Classroom Diversity and Thoughtful Engagement

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Abstract
This presentation will discuss the Theory of paper Japanese Uniqueness 「Nihonjinron」 which explores peculiarities of Japanese culture, psyche and behavior in the context of current trend in diversity in education. It assumes that regardless of Japan's image as a "homogeneous" country, there is diversity represented by various ethno-social factors such as experiences abroad, family structure, and gender identity. The author will show recent data to support this. The author argues that with Japan becoming increasingly more ethnically diverse, it has become more crucial for Japanese society to develop the capability to accommodate differences. Education is a strong force to accomplish this goal. The author will introduce the 1996 "Education for International Understanding" (EID) emphasizing diversity education. Unfortunately, Otani (2017) reports that, without adequate guidelines, schools are left on their own on how to implement this policy. There are many children who still don't get a chance to form their own positive spin on their ethnic identity. This paper will demonstrate "inclusive pedagogies" to address issues on diversity experience in the Japanese classroom, where learners will find themselves in relation to others and their place within the world.

Keywords: Ethnic Diversity, Inclusive Education, Diversified Society

Introduction

This paper assumes that regardless of Japan's image as a homogenous culture, there has been increasing diversity represented by various ethno-social factors. First, the theory of theory Japanese Uniqueness 「日本人論」a theory which explores the peculiarities of Japanese culture, psyche, and behavior, will be discussed. The author will then show recent data to support this assumption.

As Japan has become increasingly more ethnically diverse, it has become more crucial for Japanese society to develop the capability to accommodate differences. Education is a strong force to accomplish this goal. One of the attempts to bring this goal to the schools, the 1996 Program on "Education for International Understanding" (EID) which emphasizes diversity education in schools, will be discussed. The author will introduce the 1996. Unfortunately, assessment reports such as Otani (2017) indicate that without adequate guidelines, it was difficult for schools to implement the policy.

A deeper concern is that there are many children who still don't get a chance to form their own positive spin on their ethnic identity. This paper will show some examples based on previous research. It is hoped that "inclusive pedagogies" that address issues on diversity experience in the Japanese classroom, are essential for learners to find themselves in relation to others and their place within the world.

A Review of the Theory of Japanese Uniqueness

The theory of Japanese Uniqueness, in Japanese *Nihonjinron* or「日本人論」, is a theory that propagates the uniqueness of the Japanese people and the Japanese culture. Post-War discussions about the different areas of Japanese uniqueness have been published in a series of texts that focus on issues of Japanese national and cultural identity. The concept became popular after World War II, with books and articles aiming to analyze, explain, or explore peculiarities of Japanese culture that define Japanese mentality, psyche and behavior. The literature is vast, ranging from various fields as sociology, psychology, anthropology, history, linguistics and the like. Examples of these discussions are summarized as:
1)   "nihonbunkaron" (日本文化論), theories emphasizing uniqueness of Japanese culture,
2)   "nihonshakairon" (日本社会論), theories focusing uniqueness of Japanese society,
3)   "nihonron" (日本論), theories emphasizing the uniqueness of Japan"
4. "nihonkeizairon" (日本経済論), theories focusing on the unique Japanese
        Economy"

In particular, the theory advocates that the Japanese race is a unique isolate, having no known affinities with any other race. This isolation is due to the peculiar circumstances of Japan being an island country. The Japanese language is vague and has a unique grammatical structure that condition the Japanese to think in peculiar patterns. Japanese psychology, influenced by the language, is defined by a unique form of 'human relationship' with clearly defined boundaries between self and others.

Scholars such as Peter Dale (1986), Harumi Befu (1987), and Kosaku Yoshino (1992) view nihonjinron more critically, identifying it as a tool for enforcing social and political conformity. Dale, for example, characterizes the theory as follows.

> "They implicitly assume that the Japanese constitute a culturally and socially homogeneous racial entity, whose essence is virtually unchanged from prehistoric times down to the present day" (1986).

When Japan opened its ports, and subsequently the nation, to the outside world in the Meiji Era subsequent reforms sought to respond vigorously to the challenges the country was facing in relation to US and the European countries.

The Changing Ethnic Diversity in Japan

Despite Japan's image as a "homogeneous" country, there is diversity represented by various ethno-social factors such as experiences abroad, family structure, and gender. Recent research indicates the changing composition of Japanese society. For instance, Maher and Yashiro (1995), together with others, discuss the linguistic and cultural heterogeneity in Japanese society, disproving the myth of the Japanese Uniqueness called「Nihonjinron」.

Simply defined, cultural diversity is the existence of a variety of cultural groups within a society. Cultural groups can share many different characteristics like religion, ethnicity, language, nationality, sexual orientation, class, gender, age, disability, health differences, geographic location and a lot of other things. A variety of tools and methods have been used in the literature to measure culture diversity of countries (Fearon, 2003). In this paper, the following data are used to indicate the changing ethnic composition in Japan: 1) The consistent rise in the number of foreign visitors to Japan, 2) The dramatic increase in the number of Japanese living and working overseas, 3) The increase in the number of international marriages, 4) The Increasing number of children born from international marriages, 5) The Consistent increase in the number of foreign workers in Japanese industries.

1.   As a result of rapid internationalization, Japan has seen a dramatic and consistent increase in the number of incoming foreign tourists to the country. The trend in Japan's tourist boom in the past decade is indicated below.
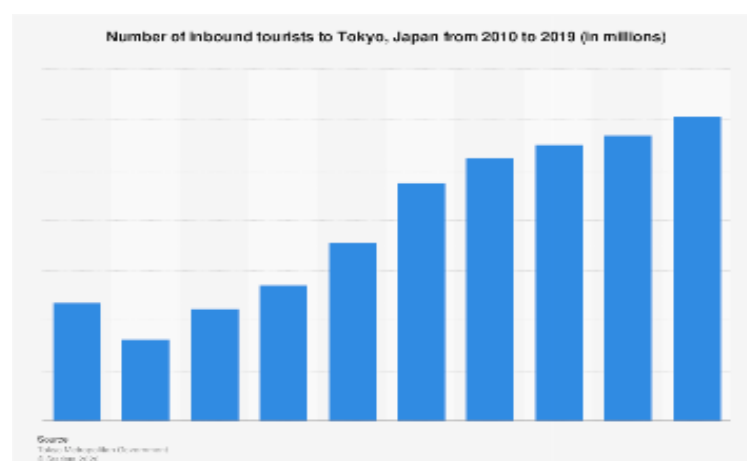

Figure 1. Trend in inbound tourists to Japan

Increased internationalization & globalization demanded changes in Japanese immigration laws to accommodate foreign workers. Number of foreign workers in Japan.

2. The trend i in Japanese traveling and living overseas has been remarkable for the past several decades reflects the increase in international travel and tourism. This is summarized below in the data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
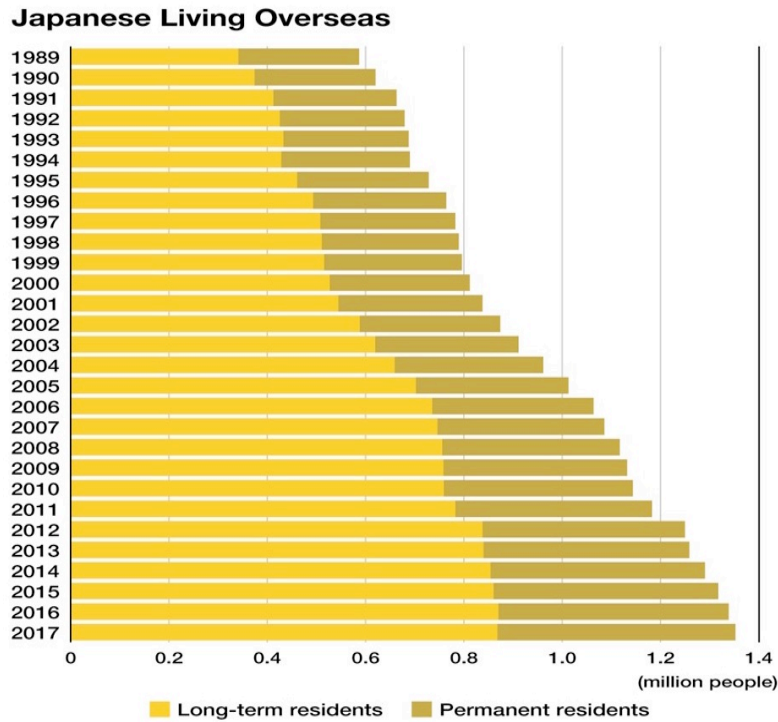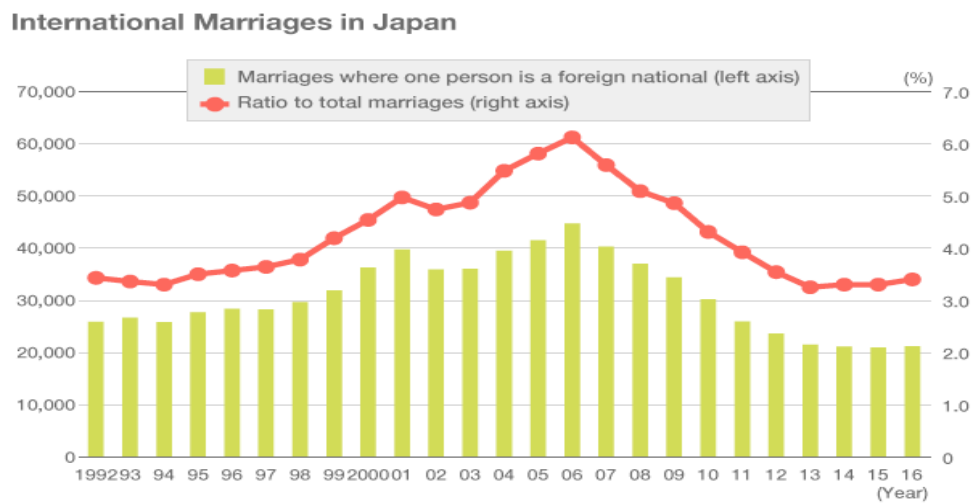

Figure 2. Trend in number of Japanese overseas

3. The changing ethnic diversity of Japanese society could not be proven better by the number of international marriages in Japan. This is indicated in the data below.

Figure 3. Trend in international marriages in Japan

4.   The increase in children with at least one non-Japanese parent has broadened the range of cultural background among the country's residents, calling for more adjustments in its legal system. The data below indicates the number of school children born from a foreign parent, as a result of increasing number of foreigners marrying Japanese nationals.
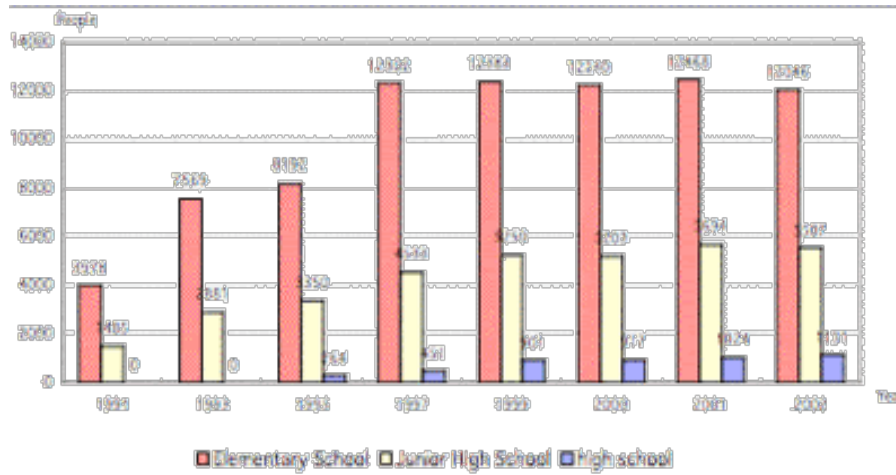

Figure 4. Trend in the number of children born from international marriages

5.   Foreign workers, foreign labor force, plays an important role in society by contributing to cultural diversity - in the diversification of ways of thinking, knowledge, and ideas. Japan has relied on foreign labor to compensate for its shrinking workforce caused by dwindling population and its aging society. Japan's foreign workers boom in recent years is summarized in the following data compiled by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare.
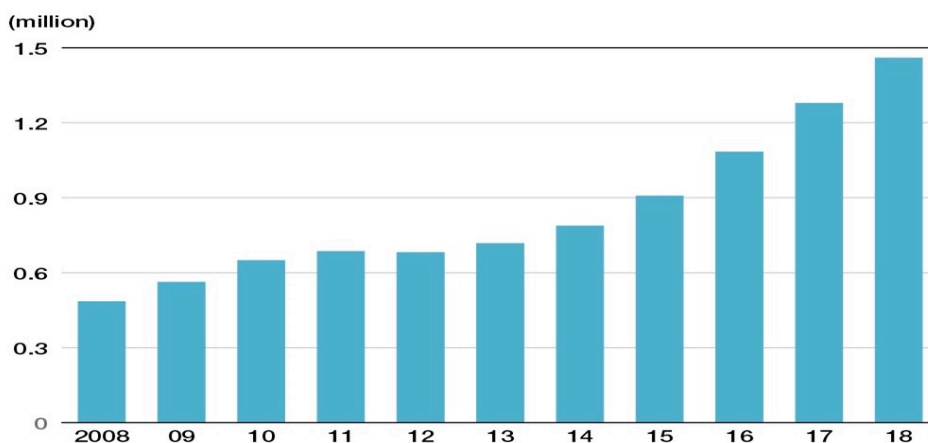

Figure 5. Trend in the number of foreign workers in Japan

Attempt to Accommodate Differences in Japanese Education

As Japan has become increasingly more ethnically diverse, it has also become more crucial for Japanese society to develop the capability to accommodate differences. Education is a strong force to accomplish this goal. One of the attempts to bring this

goal to the schools, the 1996 Program on "Education for International Understanding" (EID) which emphasizes diversity education in schools, will be discussed below.

1.   The Program on Education for International Understanding (EIU)

Back in the General Conference of 1974, UNESCO first introduced a "Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The basic principle was to establish "friendly relations between peoples and States having different social and political systems and on the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In 1996, Japan implemented "Education for International Understanding" in Japanese public schools with an overall goal of "enhancing students' basic qualities and capabilities necessary to take proactive actions from an international perspective" (Miyamoto, 2010). Specifically, the Program was to prepare children for the 21st century as society is trying to cope with rapid globalization.

According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT), qualities and capabilities that are enhanced in EID include communication skills, capability to live with different cultures, and self-establishment. Schools were to teach students about different countries, and how to interact with foreigners in Japan, as well as to increase awareness of Japanese products and those of different countries.

EID was explicitly introduced in the primary school curriculum from 2002 as one of the many topics for a school subject called "Period for Integrated Studies". The course aimed to 1) to enable pupils to think in their own way about life through cross-culture inquiry studies, 2) develop skills needed to learn and think on their own, 3) to make proactive decisions, in order to 4) be able to solve problems better" (Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology).

2.   The Problems

①   Problems with Implementation

The Program however was not without its problems. Otani (2017) reports on the implementation and problems related to the Program, and a summary of the findings include the following.

(1)   A uniform guideline for implementation was misissng. Although schools were required to implement 70 classes of Period of Integrated Studies based on its overall objectives schools were left on their own with regard to implementation of the program. Depending on each school's policies, EID could potentially be taught in a variety of other classes such as ethics class, extracurricular class, English class, and other subjects in addition to the Period for Integrated Studies.

(2)   Furthermore, schools have autonomy to decide the contents and methods for teaching Education for International Understanding.

(3)   As a consequence, there were significant differences in the delivery of the program depending on the administrative and teacher motivation of each respective school.

(4)   In addition, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology outlined several other challenges such as a decrease in priority given to EID due to increased focus on English classes.

(5)   Added to this was a lack of EID teacher professional development. This problem relates well to a lack of effective Japanese teachers who could teach the subject based on their experience living overseas, as well as failure to maximize use of external resources, such as coordination with local communities.

(6)   Most importantly, there was a growing demand to meet the increasing ethnic diverse student population as well as the needs of Japanese children returnees.

Several attempts were made to try different ways to meet the problems, but generally it was difficult to meet all of these challenges. The case of Sakaiminato, is one example of how local communities made efforts to adapt to increased globalization in its communities. To implement the Program goals, the City conducted workshops on diversity for school children outside of school hours. But this was n ot enough for students to accept and respect differences among themselves, especially to accept and respect people who they perceive to be ethnically different. The overall evaluation pointed out to the need to maximize learning within the EIU Program, and to achieve this, schools have to intensify teaching about diversity and inclusion inside the classroom (Miyamoto, 2010).

②   Less Visible and More Serious Concern

Although government efforts to increase student awareness of differences can be considered as valuable lessons, children were not learning enough how to cope with differences and how to cooperate with others whom they see as different. There had been tremendous concern with bullying, a common phenomenon in Japanese schools, particularly in relation to children of foreigners. Does the theory of Japanese uniqueness have anything to do with bullying of children of foreigners in Japan? If it does, to what extent does it influence the thinking, consciously and unconsciously, of Japanese children as they relate to other children different from them? The following section discusses experiences of children of foreigners in Japanese schools, based on Hilton and Wakita's "Cross Culture Comparison of School Bullying in Japanese and American Schools" (2020).

Cultural Factors related to bullying in Japan.

(1)   Ethnicity

Researchers have found that there are distinct differences in how bullying is experienced by children, depending on various characteristics (Macklem, 2003). A cross-cultural comparison of factors associated with school bullying in Japan and the United States show age, gender, ethnicity and personal characteristics to be related.

Is ethnicity a factor related to bullying in Japan, particularly with children of foreigners? Hilton et al's comparative study (201 0) indicates that although several studies have investigated racial or ethnic differences in the prevalence of bullying or being bullied in the United States, a rich ethnically diverse society, there is no comparable research on these differences for children living in Japan. For instance, a national study on bullying among African American, Hispanic, and Caucasian children (Nansel et al, 2001) indicated that the "content of verbal aggression among racially and ethnically diverse children is noteworthy". The paper goes on explaining that "apparently, the social norms against this form of discrimination are more powerful than those against belittling others' physical appearance or behavior.

(2)   Personal Characteristics

Studies differ in their findings on the relation of personal characteristics and bullying. Olweus (1978) found that external characteristics including skin color, are all unrelated to victimization, Hilton's study (2010) however pointed out that general public commonly believes that victimized children are singled out for abuse because of their physical appearance.

Unlike the United States, Japanese culture emphasizes the collective good, group harmony, and conformity, rather than individuality. No studies linking personal characteristics and victimization were found in the United States as it is in Japan. Sugimori (1998) suggests that even slight individual differences can provoke verbal bullying. Sugimori also suggests that the demands of an interdependent culture encourage incidents of bullying and reduce the likelihood that the victim will receive peer support.

The following is a collection of some cases of bullying experienced by children of foreigners in Japan, based on Joel Assogba's report "Fighting against Racism and Bullying in Japanese schools. It shows the diversity and depth of sad experiences of foreign children in Japanese schools and communities.

1.   A mother narrates. About two weeks after school started, she came back home from school very sad, telling us that one of her classmates told her to change her natural brown skin into "normal" (*hadairo*—ochre) color.

2.   A parent reports. My children have darker skin than the other Japanese children, and many people openly make cruel and racist comments about them: *kitanai* (dirty), *makkuro* (black and dirty), *baikin* (microbe), *unchi* (pooh), *kimochiwarui* (disgusting), *kurokoge* (blackburn), etc. When I go out with them, many parents also point at us as *gaijin* (foreigners). Those people are wrong because my children are not foreigners in Japan; they are born here and are Japanese citizens just like the other Japanese children

3.   Seven years ago, a Japanese-born daughter of a Peruvian acquaintance was bullied by her classmates soon after she began attending a public elementary school in Gunma. She had been taunted and ridiculed because of her different looks. Students called her "strange foreigner" and raked their shoes against her heels in the schoolyard.

4.   A Japanese grade-school boy who had an American ancestor was abused by his teacher in Fukuoka about five years ago. The teacher pulled the pupil's nose until it bled. He also told him to jump off a high-rise condominium and die because he wasn't a pure-blooded Japanese. The confused child was quoted as asking his parents if he was "dirty'' because he had foreign blood.

5.   Some issues are just less visible. Some mothers of foreign children instruct their children not to tell anyone at school that they are of Korean origin because they did not want their children to be teased. Most Japanese of Korean or Chinese origin having been born in Japan and speaking the language perfectly and often cannot be visually distinguished from Ethic-Japanese. To avoid discrimination, they often use a "pass name" *tsumei* (a Japanese full name instead of a Korean or Chinese one) to hide their ethnic background to avoid being discriminated.

6.   Assogba's report also includes the following case of bullying. "My best friend invited me to his home after school. His father asked me where I was born. When I replied 'Japan,' he laughed and uttered: 'if you were born here, why are you black?'" said a 7-year-old African-Japanese boy.

7.   The list also includes the author's observation on disturbing cases of Japanese returnees who, in spite of having perfect command of English, deliberately speak Katakana English, because they are afraid to sound and appear different.

The Need for Inclusive Education

Although the theme on "inclusive education" has been the focus of Japan's legislative and policy approach over the past several decades, there is still a need to shift focus towards "inclusion" in relation to ethnic diversity in the classroom. An extensive report by Assogba (2015) on "Fighting against Racism in Japan "describes some community experiments to address the problem. In summary, some of these include:
1.   Seminars for adults in the community focusing on racial diversity in the community.
2.   Seminars for adults employing different pedagogies for different sets of participants, using modules focusing on the issue of racism, prejudice, discrimination. Seminars for adults.
3.   Local lectures and seminars with the collaboration of PTA and Education Boards.
4.   The use relevant resources such reading materials specific to the issues.

Focus on themes such as Human Rights Education is much more than a lesson in schools or a theme for a day. It is a process of equipping students with the tools t o live secure and with dignity. The increased diversity in the composition of local schools could provide best resources and opportunities for student discussions on differences.   The real and live experiences with children who are different should be utilized in schools and in the classroom to lead to recognition and acceptance of others that are different. Bottom line it all boils down to culturally responsive teaching.

***Concluding Remark*s**

The myth that says Japan is inhabited by a single race has been challenged; the nation has become increasingly multi-ethnic and multiracial. However, the continued bullying of children of foreign parents indicate that the old Japanese concept of "*shimaguni konjo*" (insular mindset) which promoted Japan as a mono-racial country has been shaken but not completely gone.

The discussions in this paper indicate that a successful "inclusive education" needs a concerted effort in schools and in the community. For children to accept and appreciate differences, they are to be taught how to be critical thinkers, especially with regard to bullying, racism and discrimination. "Critical thinking is learning understand issues through examining and questioning. Young kids can develop these skills early in life, learn to know what is unfair and hurtful".

Japanese children will continue to inherit an even more diverse society from now on. They need to learn the skills of an "inclusive education" from the attitudes and behaviors of adults around them. Perhaps children need to be taught to see and look at others beyond the color of their skin; that skin color is like the different colors of their clothes. Small children, in particular, need to be taught that "Other kids' hands are black, but not dirty; other kids' skin color is not dirt; it doesn't wash away.

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